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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000808

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: ARINC FLEXING PARLIAMENT'S MUSCLES

REF: A. ANKARA 8252

[1](#)B. ANKARA 7682

[1](#)C. ANKARA 8873

(U) Classified by PolCouns John Kunstadter. Reason: 1.5(b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The growing popular desire in Turkey for comprehensive, systemic change and a more open society gives Parliament, under leadership of AK Party heavyweight Bulent Arinc, room to assert itself and its constitutional prerogatives. In principle the process should be a boon to democratization. At the same time, partly owing to the inexperience of the large majority of M.P.'s, it is likely to promote strains among leading AK figures and complicate GOT decision making. End summary.

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The Old Paradigm  
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[1](#)2. (C) As in western parliamentary democracies, Turkey's Parliament has the formal power to make law and declare war. Nevertheless, parliamentary primacy in Ankara has long been figurative. Real power traditionally has been exercised largely through a network of enduring, if informal, arrangements and relationships so ubiquitous as to confound the formal governing process. Indeed, historically, Turkey's Kemalist state apparatus, laws that perpetuate a top-down political party structure, and the natural Turkish cultural tendency toward authoritarianism all too often have vitiated not only the role of Parliament but the power of elected civilians to make decisions on national security and other policy issues (refs A, B).

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AK's Rise -- and Parliament's?  
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[1](#)3. (C) The growing popular desire for comprehensive, systemic change and a more open society -- reflected both in widespread support for EU membership and the landslide Nov. 3 election victory of the Justice and Development (AK) Party -- opens the way for Parliament to reassert its constitutional prerogatives. AK came to power not only as the first single-party government in 15 years. Replacing the fragmented legislatures of previous years, AK controls an overwhelming parliamentary majority of 362 (of 550) legislative seats, just short of a majority sufficient to amend the constitution and far outstripping the opposition pro-Establishment Republican People's Party (CHP), with 177 seats. Numerous AK contacts have described to us their intentions of promoting Parliament as an "independent" actor and as the ultimate repository of the national will.

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The Arinc Factor  
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[1](#)4. (C) The most vigorous proponent of Parliament's primacy is its ambitious Speaker, Bulent Arinc. An AK heavyweight, Arinc was not the choice of either AK Chairman Erdogan or P.M. Gul, who preferred more nondescript and non-confrontational figures for the job. Rather than allowing himself to be bypassed, however, Arinc muscled his way into the post by promoting his own candidacy and drawing on his own considerable support among the AK grassroots and more ideological elements of the Parliamentary Group. While Erdogan, Gul, and Arinc profess to be working together -- and share the same overall commitment to AK policy goals -- the manner of Arinc's election as Parliament President has established him as a force to be reckoned with. AK Parliamentary Group leaders assert to us that as Speaker, Arinc has left day-to-day AK affairs behind him.

Nevertheless, they laud him both as a comrade and as a promoter of Parliament's interests and responsibilities.

15. (C) Arinc is rhetorically reaffirming the Speaker's traditional role above the fray of partisan politics, partly to demonstrate his independence from Erdogan and Gul. Even so, he is using his position as a bully pulpit to promote his ideological and personal power interests in ways that have generated considerable controversy.

-- Shortly after assuming office, Arinc took the highly symbolic step of having his headscarf-clad wife join him to see off President Sezer on a mid-November trip abroad, prompting mainstream criticism of Arinc and AK for allegedly promoting an "anti-secularist" agenda and bringing to the fore ideological issues that Erdogan and Gul had hoped to downplay early on (ref C). With Sezer out of town, Arinc received Speaker Hastert in the Presidential Palace, emphasizing his role as "Acting President."

-- Arinc has publicly offered the cryptic comment that he "will not support the mistakes of Erdogan," a criticism apparently designed to show the voters that he (unlike P.M. Gul) is not beholden to the AK Chairman. Arinc's January visit to northern Cyprus, according to several contacts, was not coordinated with either Erdogan or the Gul government. Arinc is now expressing support for "TRNC President" Denktas even as AK and Erdogan publicly take Denktas, his cronies, and the Turkish Establishment to task for promoting corruption on the island and foot-dragging in the UN Cyprus talks.

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Comment  
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16. (C) The effort by the Arinc-led Parliament to assert itself is likely to have considerable impact on USG equities here. A stronger Parliament would be a boon for democratization, and could help break down the life-and-death control of party leaders over their subordinates -- a process, already underway in AK, which accounts in part for AK's "multi-headed" government (septel). A more assertive Parliament will help redress the perceived imbalance between the State -- unelected bureaucrats and others long accustomed to wielding nearly independent power -- and elected civilians by promoting responsibility and accountability in the political class. However, the new Parliament is full of inexperienced legislators whose ability to handle the rigors of legislative action is questionable. And to the extent the current Parliament breaks with the rubber-stamp practices traditionally associated with Turkish legislative activity, it will also promote strains among AK's leading figures -- particularly Erdogan, Arinc, and Gul -- and thus complicate GOT decision making.

PEARSON